

FINAL VERSION

# ADDRESS TO THE CANADIAN COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION, OTTAWA

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It is a pleasure to be here today, with so many of you who are in much the same line of work as my colleagues and myself at IDRC. Your commitment to improving the social and economic conditions of men and women around the world is clear. And the principles that underlie all you do also inspire our work at IDRC.

So I feel very much at home here -- knowing that a desire to develop human potential -- help people -- through partnerships and cooperative efforts is shared.

It's true that our mandates are different. Ours is to support research. Having said that, though, I'm struck by the language that guides the activities of both your Policy Committee and your International Program Committee.

You work with co-operatives around the world, offering financial resources and technical assistance, to help them develop as self-sufficient businesses and social entities. And you do it to improve social and economic conditions internationally.

This points to a grassroots, self-help approach which is informed by the notion that local people, and local organizations, are best equipped to handle local conditions. Our work at IDRC is driven by the same approach.

In other words, we are both dedicated to capacity-building.

For us, as for you, the idea is not to tell people -- who may be more than half a world away -- how to do their jobs. Rather, we're there to lend a hand. We do this by helping scientists in developing countries to identify and conduct research

into long-term, practical solutions to their problems.

We also work to strengthen indigenous research capabilities so that local communities can develop the policies and technologies required to build healthier, more equitable, more prosperous societies.

We share a basic approach and we grapple with many of the same issues.

Poverty, hunger, lack of sanitation, unsafe water, assaults on the environment because of poor economic choices, inequality -- these are the over-arching problems that confound international assistance programs of all types. Including yours and ours.

We face daunting challenges, to be sure.

But as you know Canada has a record of distinction and accomplishment in this area. Canadians are known in development circles around the world for a kind of quiet commitment to results. We at IRDC like to think we've made some significant contributions to that story.

Mind you, the last few years have not been easy for those who manage or deliver international development assistance programs. The funding situation has been extremely difficult.

But then, you know the facts as well as I do.

No doubt you also know what all the opinion polling in recent years seems to indicate -- when it comes to ranking how the public would like to see government spend money. And that is that international development assistance is "off the radar screen," as the pollsters would say.

In light of that, I would be remiss if I did not make this point: The answers that people give to the questions pollsters ask them is directly dependent on how those questions are phrased.

If people are asked whether they would like to pay lower taxes, they'd be crazy to answer in the negative. However, if they're asked whether they'd like to pay less

in taxes -- at the expense of the welfare of the men, women and children in the developing world -- they might give quite a different answer.

The reality is that Canadians are proud of the way we have historically supported international development. And I'm convinced that that support will only rise as people learn more about how inter-connected we in the North are with the South.

So appearances -- grim as they may be from time to time -- can be deceiving. Let me give you a very good example -- Mr. Martin's federal budget last month.

To quote from the budget speech itself, Mr. Martin specifically promised "new resources to Overseas Development Assistance." He also committed Canada to a leadership role in the international community in addressing the issue of crippling debt in developing countries.

"A nation is not a corporation. Markets do many things -- and they do them well. But there are many things they cannot do. Markets cannot provide quality health care to all of us when we are sick. They cannot prevent the gap between rich and poor from becoming an unbridgeable gap. ...They do not deal with the common good. Therefore, we must."

Mr. Martin is right.

Canadians *are* concerned about issues of international aid -- despite what some of those polls seem to suggest. They may not want to see foreign aid wasted, but they don't want to see it ended, either.

What they *do* want is to know that their money is being put to socially useful ends -- that it is actually working to improve the quality of people's lives. Doing this means furthering the support of effective aid programs -- a task that we know is eminently achievable.

I've been impressed by some recently released World Bank research in this area.

The Bank's Development Research Group had spent years examining development aid patterns. To my mind, one of its most significant conclusions is that effective aid -- the kind that actually reduces poverty -- involves much more

than money. For in fact, effective aid is a combination of money and ideas.

Knowledge creation -- the ideas side of aid -- is critical both for helping countries reform, and for helping communities effectively provide such essential public services as education, health and sanitary water.

Often it isn't a lack of money that prevents the delivery of these services. What's wrong is ineffective policies and institutions that don't deliver at the grassroots level.

Let me give you an example.

In Pakistan, substantially fewer girls than boys attend school -- in fact, only about half as many do, according to UNESCO figures. In one region, though, donors worked with local communities to design an approach to meet community needs. The government provided the money to start schools -- on condition that the community would commit to an agreed-upon level of female participation. The local community association, which controlled the hiring of teachers, often hired female teachers for the new schools.

Female enrollment immediately jumped.

That one small example underlines clearly a fact with which we are quite familiar -- namely that well-designed assistance can help communities find new ways to provide services. In addition, it can help them evaluate the effectiveness of new approaches.

Disseminating knowledge about what works when it comes to delivering services -- and what doesn't -- is a key contribution foreign aid can make.

Perhaps more Canadians are getting this point. In recent months, as I've scanned the editorial pages of our newspapers, I've been struck by the amount of coverage that's been given to making development assistance a higher priority.

This is in stark contrast to previous years. It is certainly not an observation I could have made standing before you here, 12 months ago.

And the government – which reads polls at least as well as anyone -- knows it. They know it because of the work of organizations like yours and mine, among many others.

That's good news for our organizations, because we are the kind of people who remind government of two things:

The first is that there is a constituency out there -- a broad public that values and, indeed, takes considerable pride in the notion of international development assistance.

Second, we are in touch with that constituency, and respected by it -- which shows that we are doing our job. To the degree to which this is true, it also means that we, in turn, are more likely to be heard when we talk to government. Which we do. All the time.

And the government is listening. Maybe not as closely as some of you would like. But I am convinced it is listening.

The locally-driven approach employed by IDRC, the CCA, and the member organizations that you represent, is one that effectively turns responsibility for economic and social progress back to people in developing countries.

In our case, of course, we work with a particular group of people -- the small band of trained scientists and other researchers who seek solutions to very real problems. Let me give you a small sampling of the kind of research initiatives that we are supporting in IDRC.

**Cities Feeding People** is, as the name implies, a research program involving urban agriculture. An estimated 800 million people practise urban agriculture by growing vegetables and raising livestock in cities. That number is going to grow enormously over the next two decades. By the year 2025, according to UN estimates, more than two-thirds of the world's population will be living in cities. Almost all of this explosion in urbanization will take place in the South.

For the inhabitants of sprawling megacities, the practice of urban agriculture can be a life-line. One that would provide them with better diets and higher incomes,

improve local food supplies, put marginal lands to use, and absorb wastes.

Meanwhile, many urban farmers face tremendous obstacles -- not the least of which is the need for higher technological and organizational precision because of the intensity of urban agriculture and the environmental stress it creates.

**Cities Feeding People** supports research that examines the political and technical solutions needed to make urban ecosystems sustainable, and to improve the well-being and health of those city dwellers who are low-income food producers and consumers.

This is particularly important, given that in the next decade we will have arrived at the point at which about three out of every five people on Earth will be living in urban areas.

Like many of IDRC's programs, the findings generated by **Cities Feeding People** research help to inform the work of another, which we call **Ecosystem Approaches to Human Health**. Ecosystem health, although it may sound jargonistic, has a quite specific meaning. For ecosystem health encompasses the complex interplay between the environment and the socioeconomic, cultural and political conditions of people.

Specifically, this program supports research aimed at identifying ways to better management of ecosystems interventions in order to improve human health and well-being. At the same time, researchers attempt to understand how to maintain, or improve, the health of the ecosystem as a whole.

IDRC is currently studying ecosystems that face stress in three areas of human activity -- mining, large-scale agriculture and urbanization.

The goal of the **People, Land and Water** initiative is to contribute to improving the quality of life of communities in Africa and the Middle East through more equitable, sustainable, and productive use of land and water resources.

We specifically chose these two regions because their problems are particularly severe. They encompass the semi-arid regions, and the highland ecosystem of sub-Saharan Africa. This initiative supports research, and attempts to enhance

communications among governments, communities and local institutions.

I want to come back to the **People, Land and Water** initiative in a couple of minutes.

Some of our other programs are rooted in policy-based research. One in particular -- which looks at the micro-impacts of macroeconomic adjustment policies -- is focused on supporting developing countries in their struggle to re-structure their economies while ensuring that the basic needs of their poor are being met.

This initiative promotes a participatory approach to monitoring poverty at the community level in developing countries. This is practical research that involves people in their own development by providing the kind of information required to develop policy. To bring it back home, that is certainly something, say, a farming family in Saskatchewan or the members of a dairy co-op in Quebec, or fisherfolk in Newfoundland can readily appreciate.

Our program, which we call MIMAP, supports developing country researchers who develop economic models that help countries understand and assess how, and to what degree, macro or national-level policies affect everyone.

They develop "Poverty Monitoring Systems" which enable frequent -- and timely -- poverty surveys. Finally, we support focus studies that encourage a multi-disciplinary approach to drawing the poverty picture within a particular country.

We also work in those countries that are emerging from war and are attempting to make the difficult transition to a peace that is durable, one with social equity and progress towards sustainable development. Lebanon, Mozambique and South Africa are but three examples of countries in which we are working successfully in this field.

Our **Peace Building and Reconstruction** initiative supports research, policy development and capacity building as tools for those countries making the transition from war to peace. It focuses on the specific development challenges facing countries emerging from conflict, and takes an approach that actively contributes to the process of reconciliation and reconstruction.

The PBR program supports research both *on* and *for* peace-building. In other words, it seeks to add to the knowledge base about peace-building to help guide policy and action at the local, national, and international levels.

And because the program also aims to contribute actively to peace-building and reconstruction in war-torn countries, it supports research that serves as a tool to stimulate dialogue, consensus and coalition-building, and policy development.

I mentioned our People, Land and Water initiative a moment ago. I'd like to close by giving you a good, clear, practical example that demonstrates how the way in which we work as institution is inseparable from what we do.

IDRC has for many years supported research initiatives in the Middle East to address issues arising out of the fact that access to water is a major contributor to conflict in the region. Water, indeed, has been the key natural-resource issue for 3,000 years.

Since the Middle East Peace Accord was signed in 1993, however, teams of Israeli and Palestinian researchers have been seeking peaceful and effective means to jointly manage an aquifer that they depend upon -- and which happens to be the area's largest source of quality drinking area.

The Yarqon-Tannin Mountain Aquifer, which has its main catchment on the West Bank and flows into Israeli territory, is a vital source of water for both communities. It is critical that its water quality, and quantity, be preserved, something that's difficult both because of the geology, and the political history of the area.

But with IDRC's assistance, what is quietly happening now, is the building of an institution for joint management of this critical resource. The trick is not sharing water. It's sharing the management of water -- building trust by having people, in this case researchers, actually making the rules together.

In other words, People, Land and Water -- as riches to share.

I hope this brief description of some of our programs gives you a feel for the wide range of research activity we're involved in -- working with local authorities who



know their situation on the ground best.

Thank you.